

2006 Hunting Conditions at Medicine Lake NWR

August 22, 2006

The Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge and the Northeast Montana Wetland Management District open to upland game bird hunting on September 1st. The youth waterfowl season will be September 23rd - 24th, and general waterfowl hunting opens on September 30th. Ring-necked pheasant season opens on October 7th and continues through January 1st, 2007 for both residents and non-residents. Big game archery season runs September 2nd - October 15th and rifle season runs October 22nd - November 26th. See Refuge Hunting Map at <http://medicinelake.fws.gov/hunting> for areas open to hunting. Nontoxic shot is required for all shotgun hunting on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lands, including the Medicine Lake Refuge and all Waterfowl Production Areas. Refuge hunting follows State of Montana seasons and regulations found at <http://fwp.state.mt.us> and no additional special permits or licenses are required to hunt the Refuge. Hunting Areas #1 and #3 open for upland game bird and deer hunting beginning November 15th and will remain open for the remainder of the appropriate hunting season. See Refuge Hunting Map and Regulations at <http://medicinelake.fws.gov/hunting> for further information.

Regional Conditions

The winter of 2005-2006 was fairly mild in northeast Montana and upland bird survival was fairly good. However; the spring and summer received very little rainfall and the area is extremely dry. Deer also faired well and counts place the population numbers near the 15 year average.

Refuge Conditions

Pheasants: Refuge pheasant numbers started out strong, but spring and early summer was very dry and numbers are not as good now. Hunting opportunities will probably be good, but broods are not as large as previous years.

Sharp-tailed grouse: Lek counts were good this year but few sightings of broods are being reported. Population numbers are estimated to be near the ten year average.

Partridge: Numbers are on the increase but are still well below the long term average.

Waterfowl: A very dry spring and early summer have resulted in low wetland conditions in the area. Some Refuge water units were refilled but many are now dry with water remaining only in the larger water bodies. The Waterfowl Production Areas suffered the same low rainfall and only a few of the larger lakes still hold water, most of the favorite swan hunting areas are dry this year. Hunting opportunities will be quite limited compared to previous years on the Refuge and Waterfowl Production Areas. For more waterfowl information check out the following sites: <http://www.fws.gov> & <http://www.ducks.org>

Big game: Whitetail deer numbers have recovered from the late 90's and this winter's doe/fawn counts were only slightly below the fifteen year average. Mule deer and pronghorn numbers remain low because the Refuge is not in the preferred habitat for these two species.

Free Sandhill Crane permits for the Central Flyway of Montana are available at the Refuge headquarters on a first-come/first-served basis. The permit is also available at Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge (<http://bowdoin.fws.gov/>), Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks regional offices in Glasgow, Billings, and Miles City, or the state office in Helena(<http://fwp.state.mt.us/>).

Swan permits are only available from Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Please contact them at (406)228-3700 for more information.